

MODELS OF BEST PRACTICE IN SERVING LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENT
STUDENTS

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Teaching To a Diverse World

Schools of Education across the nation are preparing to meet the requirements of the various accreditation organizations that validate their ability to prepare educators for the 21st century. This task has become increasingly difficult to achieve, when not only future educators must be skillful and knowledgeable in their specialty areas, but also future educators need the dispositions to work with a diverse population of students and families. What is our role as the faculty in these teacher preparation programs? What are our responsibilities? What about our dispositions?

The Journal of Teacher Education devoted an issue to this topic. This issue was titled ***“Demography and Democracy: Teacher Education and Changing Populations”***. Several articles included in this issue are relevant to us involved in the everyday task of preparing future educators. Hodgkinson (2002) in his article ***“Demographics and Teacher Education: Overview”*** provided interesting and thought provoking demographic data:

- 61% of the population increase in the next 20 years will be Hispanic, about 40% Hispanic and 20% Asian; but then as now 10 states will contain 90% of Hispanic population and 10 will contain 90% of the Asian population and 7 will do both.

- Whites make up the largest number of poor kids; 9 million, compared to 4 million Blacks and 4 million Hispanics. Minorities, however make up the highest percentage of poor kids, about 38%, compared to only 18% of white kids.
- Race is no longer universally handicapping condition, poverty is.

Thus, Hodgkinson (2002) stated “if we look at what changes America, it is 1 million immigrants a year, 4 million births, 2 million deaths and 43 million people moving each year” (pg104). Transience is a major factor in crime rates, poor health care and poor performing schools and states. As further discussed by Hodgkinson (2002), some of the issues confronted by faculty and administrators in teacher preparation programs across the nation are: the decline of Black, Hispanic and Asian enrollments in teacher education programs since 1990, the small percentage of school of education faculty who are from minority groups, and of all these changing demographics in the population of children attending our public schools.

In the same issue of the Journal of Teacher Education the article ***“Preparing for Culturally Responsive Teaching”*** was published. This article was drawn from Dr. Gay’s recent book of the same title. In her article as well as her book she proposed “culturally responsive teaching” as an effective approach for working with underachieving African, Asian, Latino, and Native Americans students. Culturally responsive teaching is defined as using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively. It is based on the assumption that

when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly (Gay, 2000). Gay's (2002) notion of drawing from the students' experiences for meaningful learning was validated by Nieto (1994) in her article ***"Lessons from Students on Creating a Chance to Dream"***. In this article, she interviewed several high school students from diverse ethnic backgrounds. The students' responses reflected that students were motivated and involved with their own learning when their own experiences were taken in consideration.

In conclusion, teachers of students of diverse backgrounds are put to the task of learning more about the cultures of their students and how they affect learning behaviors, and how classroom interactions and instruction can be changed to embrace these differences. More so, the article ***"My Eyes have been Opened: White Teachers and Racial Awareness"*** by Johnson (2002) discussed the author's research study that used a life history approach to examine the narratives of 6 white teachers of racially diverse classrooms. These narratives were analyzed to investigate how white teachers' concepts of race may change over time, and to document the socialization process by which some white teachers reject the color blind perspective toward race in their personal and professional lives. Implications for their use in pre-service and in-service teacher education programs were also examined. The results of this study are thought provoking and might have a profound impact on curricular decisions for teacher preparation programs in the United States.

The participants in this study reported that teacher preparation programs had little influence on their racial and cultural awareness. For the six of them, life experiences and beliefs systems toward racial awareness and cultural diversity were well formed before their teacher education training began.

Several implications from these findings are drawn:

- Instead of attempting to change the attitudes of pre-service teachers toward racial and cultural diversity, some researchers and teacher educators have advocated for more a more selective and recruitment process.

Johnson (2002) suggested that the first step might be to actively recruit prospective teachers who bring more diverse life experiences to the teacher preparation program.

- Faculty of color in teacher preparation programs must be vigorously recruited and supported to serve as roles models, mentors, and support for minority students.
- Immersion experiences will provide teacher candidates the opportunities to critically reflect on those experiences and potentially help them to deepen understanding on diverse cultures.
- Autobiographical narrative as a pedagogical tool helped guide teachers' personal reflections and heighten their racial awareness.

References

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